



## THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

*Students will learn about the Tuskegee Airmen and how historic figures have advanced the rights of the individual. Special emphasis is placed on having respect for others and on valuing things that make us different.*

### LESSON PLAN

#### Learning Objectives

The students will

- Learn about the Tuskegee Airmen, heroic African American pilots of World War II
- Identify historic figures who believed in fundamental democratic values such as equality, the rights of the individual and responsibility for the common good
- Describe how historic figures have advanced the rights of individuals and promoted the common good
- Identify character traits such as persistence, problem solving and respect for others
- Explain why important buildings and monuments are associated with national history, such as the White House and veterans' memorials (such as the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II Memorial)
- Build a glider so that they may create a working model, test fly it and then ask/understand how it works

#### Introduction/Background

From the infancy of our country, African American men and women have fought and died defending a nation that has often denied them many of the fundamental rights of citizenship. The Tuskegee Airmen were dedicated young men who became America's first group of African American military airmen, at a time when many people thought that African Americans lacked intelligence, courage, skill and patriotism. They came from all parts of the country, with large numbers coming from Los Angeles, Washington, New York City, Detroit, Chicago and Philadelphia. Each and every one of them possessed a burning, personal desire to serve the United States to the best of their abilities. Those who had the physical and mental qualifications were accepted as aviation cadets to be trained as single-engine pilots, and later, to be either twin-engine pilots, navigators or bombardiers. Most were college graduates or undergraduates, and others demonstrated their academic abilities through comprehensive entrance examinations. New recruits trained for nine months at the prestigious Tuskegee Institute in Alabama (designated as Tuskegee Army Air Field or TAAF). The training and classes were very difficult, and no standards or parameters were lowered for any of the recruits.

**Grade Level:** 2—4

**National Standards for History:**  
Chronological Thinking and Historical Comprehension.

**National Standards for the English Language Arts:**  
Multicultural Understanding and Communication Skills.

**National Science Education Standards:**  
Science as Inquiry.

#### Materials Required:

- Magic board and markers
- PowerPoint presentation
- Laptop, monitor, digital projector
- Balsa wood glider with red tail
- Styrofoam egg carton lids
- Egg carton glider paper templates
- Black or blue ink pens
- Student scissors
- Large paper clips
- X-Acto knife

#### Resources:

- Children's Literature:  
*Wind Flyers* by Angela Johnson; New York: Simon & Schuster Books; 2007  
*The Tuskegee Airmen Story* by Lynn M. Homan and Thomas Reilly; Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc; 2002
- General Information:  
[http://www.tuskegeeairmen.org/Tuskegee\\_Airmen\\_History.html](http://www.tuskegeeairmen.org/Tuskegee_Airmen_History.html) and  
<http://www.tuskegee.edu/global/story.aspx?s=1127695&ClientType=Printable> and  
[http://www.lanl.gov/news/index.php/fuseaction/home.story/story\\_id/9757](http://www.lanl.gov/news/index.php/fuseaction/home.story/story_id/9757)

From 1941 through 1946, nearly 1,000 young men were trained as pilots, and, after successfully completing the training, they received their commissions and silver pilot wings. The Tuskegee Airmen formed the 332nd Fighter Group which originally consisted of four fighter squadrons: the 99th, the 100th, the 301st and the 302nd.

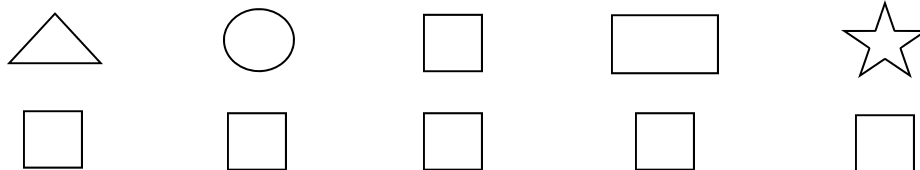
They flew over 15,000 missions/sorties in the European Theater of World War II, as well as in the North African and Mediterranean Theaters. For every pilot, there were at least ten African American men and women on the ground in supporting roles, including medical technicians, mechanics, administrative personnel and cooks. White American pilots were not allowed to fly more than 52 missions/sorties, but African American pilots often flew up to 100 missions due to lack of replacements.

Aircraft flown by the Tuskegee Airmen included the P-40 'Warhawk,' the P-47 'Thunderbolt,' the P-39 'Airacobra' and the plane that they are most recognized for flying, the P-51 'Mustang.' In fact, they painted the tails of these planes red, which led them to become known as the "Red Tails." And, since they were not allowed to practice or fight with their white counterparts, this gave them a distinction that made them very, very proud. Their success as B-17 and B-24 bomber escorts was amazing. It has been said that, when enemy fighter pilots saw the red-tailed P-51's, they thought twice about attacking! The Tuskegee Airmen had one of the lowest loss records of all the escort fighter groups, and their services were in high demand by all of the Allied bomber units.

Sixty-six of them died in combat and thirty-three became prisoners of war (POW's). The Tuskegee Airmen fought TWO WARS: one against the enemy and enemy aircraft, and the other against prejudice and racism while serving in the military and when returning home to America. In 1948, President Harry S. Truman enacted Executive Order 9981, which directed equality of treatment and opportunity in all American Armed Forces, and in time, this led to the end of racial segregation in the U. S. military. In 2006, surviving members of the Tuskegee Airmen were invited to the White House and were given special commendations by President Bush. In addition, many of them were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal at a special ceremony in the U. S. Capitol Rotunda. There were numerous photographs taken of the President saluting individual Tuskegee Airmen—symbolizing all the salutes they never got when they were commissioned officers and pilots serving their country!

### Procedures:

- Write on board the things that will be covered/discussed/reviewed in class, including: history of Tuskegee Airmen, red-tailed glider flight, PowerPoint presentation, the books *Wind Flyers* and *The Tuskegee Airmen Story*, valuing our differences, student glider building and flying.
- Hook: safely fly your balsa wood glider with the red tail (which you have added using a red magic marker).
- Ask the students why they think the glider has a red tail. Tell them that you will discuss the importance of the red tail later in the lesson.
- Ask the students to think about someone related to them who is an adult: an aunt, an uncle, grandparents, parents, etc.
- Take out the book *The Tuskegee Airmen Story* and tell them that the pages you are about to read relate to a grandfather answering his grandkids' questions.
- Read pages 8—13 to the students, showing them the illustrations on each page.
- Describe and discuss the Tuskegee Airmen briefly; use PowerPoint slides of them training: <http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-110419-026.ppt>
- Show the students PowerPoint slides of the World War II aircraft that the Tuskegee Airmen flew and the aircraft that they protected (contained on the same PowerPoint presentation).
- Show the class PowerPoint slides of honors related to the Tuskegee Airmen, including the Congressional Gold Medal, the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II Memorial and their visit to Washington, D.C. to meet with President Bush (same PowerPoint presentation).
- Tell the students that you are now going to read *Wind Flyers*, the book upon which this lesson plan is built.
- Read each page (1—30) and show each colorful, pastoral illustration to the class/discuss as appropriate.
- Draw a triangle, a circle, a square, a rectangle and a star on the board, adjacent to one another and in a straight line. Then draw five squares adjacent to each other and in a straight line, so that they are directly beneath the geometric shapes on the first line. Please note the following illustration:



### Procedures (continued)

- Tell the students to remember that each and every one of them is important. We are all special, and we should VALUE what makes us different (point to the varying geometric shapes in the first line). Otherwise, it would be a pretty boring world—if we were all the same, that is (point to the five congruent squares).
- Announce that it is now time for students to build their gliders. Special Note: one of the learning objectives is that students will build a glider so that they may create a working model, test fly it and then ask/understand how it works/flies (National Science Education Standards/Science As Inquiry/Evidence, Models And Explanation—Models correspond to real objects and have explanatory power. They help both scientists and students understand how things work).
- Use ‘materials required’ reference box on the first page of this lesson plan as a checklist, and pass out egg carton glider materials to all students. Note: this glider is based on an original design by Mr. Paul Billings).
- For younger students, you may wish to trace around the template and pre-cut the glider shape with an X-Acto knife, so that the leading and trailing edges are smoother for better flights.
- Carefully show the class each step in the glider-building process at <http://www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-110419-028.pdf>.
- Have the students put their initials, first name or appropriate nickname on their glider.
- Walk around the classroom, checking the students’ gliders, making adjustments whenever necessary.
- Tell the class to put the gliders off to the side, until it is time to test fly them.
- Move the class to the gymnasium and allow students to safely fly their gliders in an orderly fashion, perhaps in several rows of ten students each, lined up behind one another.

### Assessment/Evaluation

The students should be evaluated on their overall class participation, listening skills and their ability to follow verbal instructions (especially when they are constructing their gliders). You may also wish to lead a discussion about what was taught during the lesson, emphasizing specific, positive points regarding the Tuskegee Airmen and the example they set for all of us.

### Extension

Have the students interview an adult at home. Ask the class to discover what stories their parents, grandparents or aunts/uncles have to offer, and to be prepared to share at least one story in class within a few days.

### References

*Wind Flyers* by Angela Johnson; New York: Simon & Schuster Books; 2007

*The Tuskegee Airmen Story* by Lynn M. Homan/Thomas Reilly; Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Co., Inc.; 2002

Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.

[http://www.tuskegeeairmen.org/Tuskegee\\_Airmen\\_History.html](http://www.tuskegeeairmen.org/Tuskegee_Airmen_History.html)

Tuskegee University

<http://www.tuskegee.edu/global/story.asp?s=1127695&ClientType=Printable>

Los Alamos National Laboratory

[http://www.lanl.gov/news/index.php/fuseaction/home.story/story\\_id/9757](http://www.lanl.gov/news/index.php/fuseaction/home.story/story_id/9757)